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SEND THEM OUT DREAMING AND SCREAMING

Jerry L. Walker

Two weeks ago I requested of a group of prospective teachers who were to begin their student teaching last week that they write a paragraph for me answering the question, "How idealistic should a beginning teacher be?" Having worked with them all semester, I had watched their anxieties grow as the time of reckoning approached, and I had tried as best I could to give them realistic answers to the growing number of questions they asked about what to do if a student refuses to do what you've told him to, what to do if the students ask questions you can't answer, and what to do when you see that the lesson you've planned so carefully is dying a terrible death. I was curious to see how much of their initial idealism had survived the descriptions, prescriptions, and war stories I delivered myself of in answer to their questions. To make the exercise psuedo-scientific, I asked them not to sign their names to their paragraphs. Here are six of them:

> A new teacher should have some basic ideals he hopes to realize. There is much wrong in our educational system, and only if we want to change it, will change ever come about. However an idealistic person must also be very thick-skinned, and not be disappointed easily. Change will come very slow, if at all, so the idealistic person runs the risk of becoming discouraged and possibly losing any motivation to teach at all. We should all have ideals, but let's try to keep them in perspective, realizing before we have a chance to be discouraged that our ideals will not be easily realized. Don't let discouragement make us lose our ideals.

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Be idealistic enough to bestow trust--because you find in the world that which you look for, yet mature enough not to be shocked by betrayal. Idealistic enough to be enthusiastic and want to set the world on fire, yet sensitive enough to recognize the type of wood you are lighting. Be idealistic in wanting change and working for it, but not so idealistic that when it doesn't come tomorrow you are crushed. Your ideal is a goal, steadfastly work for it, and keep your high ideals because you can rise no farther than you reach.

How idealistic should a beginning teacher be? How should I know? I don't have too many facts to base a decision on. I guess my immediate reaction is that a beginning teacher should be as idealistic as possible and still be able to survive in the educational system that exists now. I think ideally people who are going to be teachers should be exposed to the system earlier and then come back to the campus and discuss How to survive and how to improve the system. It would probably be a good idea to repeat this process several times. At the end of this training program teachers could be sent out idealistic but also prepared to be more effective revolutionaries in the battle for school reform.

I firmly believe that our school system must be changed. I think that one of the reasons it has been taking so long to achieve change is that people tend to give up on ideology very quickly. It seems to me that many teachers are too insecure (i.e., they think they will lose their jobs) and/or too lazy to keep trying to change things. Once a teacher is settled into a certain pattern of teaching, it is much easier to maintain that pattern than to change. Therefore, I think that all teachers, especially new ones who haven't established a pattern of teaching, should be very idealistic. Obviously a teacher must present information in some kind of logical order or students will learn nothing. But a teacher should try to keep learning about changes in education at all times and incorporate changes into his way of teaching.

I don't see that there is anything wrong with student teachers being completely idealistic. From what I hear, things are only going to get worse. But, if I allow myself to believe that, there doesn't seem to be much point in even starting to teach. I really do believe that things are only as good as you make them

> If you walk into a class expecting disaster, I think the students can sense that. People like to hear themselves praised. Your students really are some of the best, the wittiest, the brightest. I intend to tell them that, and I think they will live up to it.
>
> I think that a beginning teacher should be the most idealistic human being that ever walked this earth. Idealism means that he or she has fresh ideas and is brimming with enthusiasm. The idealist wants to go out into teaching and inspire kids to learn. The problem the teacher (student or beginning) faces is that the real world just doesn't function for idealists. The beginning teacher gets into the system and gets badgered until he conforms to the mold of "traditionalist teaching." The idealistic teacher eventually allows the system to sway him because of economic reasons, or he quits and education suffers another casualty.

Those are six of the twenty-one responses I received from my students, and all of the others were essentially the same. All of the students expressed a kind of commitment to idealism. All believedthat following their ideals would make them better teachers and lead to eventual improvements in the system. All believed that improvements were needed, and all accepted some responsibility for bringing them about. But throughout all the responses was an underlying acceptance of the belief that in the confrontation with reality their ideals would lose out, their behavior would conform to survival tactics, and their methodology would be determined by its ease-of-operation factor. The system is so powerful, they seem to feel, that they must either conform to it or get out of it, thereby adding their names to the long list of educational casualties. And the terrible thing , it seems to me, is that so long as they

accept that as a possibility, it will continue to be the reality.

How can we convince them that they don't have to become educational casualties? Or how can we convince them that what might have been true in the past need not be true today and tomorrow? How can we give them the fervor and the zeal that will be needed to sustain them in the face of apparently overwhelming resistance? What can we say or show to them, do to them, or give to them that will encourage the beginning teachers we send out to prevail and not just endure? How can we nourish those who want to prevail? What do we, their teachers, have to do by way of example to give them faith that the battle with conformity is worth fighting and that it can be won?

I want no more teaching casualties on either side of the desk. I want teachers who dream not only in deep sleep, but also in full consciousness. I want teachers who scream with indignation when they are told that something exciting they want to do can't be done because of this or that systemic restriction. I want teachers who by sheer dint of their imaginations can soar with their students far above today's contaminated educational clouds and breathe the new, fresh air of awe and wonder. I want teachers who know that the only real reality is what's inside each and every one of us and who know that that reality is constantly changing. I want teachers who see that change is the natural order of things and that the only alternative is death. And I want teachers who are alive!

I recently found a whole schoolful of alive, exciting, idealistic teachers in Quincy, Illinois; and they weren't that way because of anything that had happened to them in their teacher education programs, but because the Quincy administrators had found a way to release the hidden potential for creative enterprise which they felt every teacher had. Getting teachers to release and use that potential was, according to the people I talked to, the most difficult part of Quincy's experiment with alternative modes of education.

The experiment began with the assumptions that individual teachers and students are different and that those differences should be cherished and capitalized on. It was felt that both teaching and learning could be maximized by providing alternatives that reflected individual preferences. To that end, teachers were asked how they saw themselves as teachers and what they would prefer to teach. According to their intial responses, the teachers fell into four groups, but after talking to each other in those groups, they found that significant differences still existed within each of the four groups. When all of those differences had finally been identified and discussed, each teacher agreed to become a member of one of seven alternative educational schools: traditional, flexible, individual study, fine arts, career, work study, or special education. Having identified the kind of school they would prefer to teach in, the teachers were told, "Okay, now build those schools." And they did.

They determined what would be taught in each of those seven schools, how it would be taught, and why it would be taught. Today those seven alternative schools are operational under one roof, and each student is free to choose the one that he feels best fits his learning style and educational goal. The Quincy experiment is called, appropriately enough, Education by Choice, and it works not just because it provides learning by choice, but because it provides teaching by choice.

When questioned about the implications of Education by Choice for teacher education, the administrators were quick to point out the need for us to send them teachers who knew who they were, how they wanted to teach, and how to implement their ideas. They didn't know or care, really, how we could produce beginning teachers like that, but they were certain that we should find ways to do it. They didn't want to have to take on the formal education of teachers as well as students. The former, they felt, was clearly the responsibility of teacher education institutions.

Now I know and you know that every school is not Quincy and that many schools don't provide either teachers or students with significant choices to make. But how many of the beginning teachers we send out are prepared to make a choice even if they were given the opportunity to? How many of them have had to answer the questions of who they are, what they believe, and what those things mean for them as teachers? How many beginning teachers have had the opportunity to explore those questions in alternative teaching contexts? How many have

been asked what they think the content of the English curriculum ought to be or how it should be organized and taught? How many of them have ever been asked to do anything but comply with the thoughts, feelings, ideas, and demands of others? No, every school is not Quincy, and it's no wonder, for we haven't produced beginning teachers who demanded that they be. Rather, most of the teachers we have produced have gone out to the schools expecting to be told what to teach and how to teach just as they were told what to do throughout their whole school experience.

If it is true--and I think it is--that beginning teachers tend to teach as they have been taught, those of us in teacher education who teach methods courses and who are usually the last teaching models prospective teachers have before being sent out as teachers have a special responsibility of being not just good, but great teachers. And if it is true--and I think it is--that student teaching is the most highly valued portion of their preparation programs by our students, then that experience must be structured so that it contributes its share in the production of not just good, but great teachers. Those two segments of a teacher's preparation are the ones you and I are most apt to have control over, and it is through that control that we can have great impact on educational reform. If we want the teachers we produce to change the schools, we, ourselves, must change.

Let me address myself first to how I think we and our methods classes must change. To begin with, we must stop

trying to indoctrinate our students with our ideas about what English ought to be or how it ought to be taught. The Dartmouth view of what English teaching should be, for instance, is all right for some teachers in some places working with some kids; and that's how it ought to be dealt with--as just one of the alternative ways of conceiving of our subject matter. It and other views should be analyzed for what they imply regarding the teacher's role, the selection and organization of content, the student's role in the classroom, and the evaluation of teaching and learning. The methods teacher's job is not to advocate any one approach to teaching English, but to ask, "If you accept this view of what English is all about, what does it mean for you as an English teacher?" Because of his wider experience, the methods teacher can acquaint his prospective teachers with conditions and situations they hadn't imagined as a way of further testing the implications of a particular conceptual view of English. The result should be a deeper understanding of and a greater commitment to the need for alternative conceptual views of our subject matter.

Along the same line, the conceptual views of English that are considered shouldn't be only those that have been or are currently being advocated in professional writings and discussions. Instead, we should be encouraging our prospective teachers to build their own concepts by asking such questions as these: What have you learned in your

English classes that you believe is worth teaching to others? Is what you've identified worth learning by all students? Can it be learned by students at any age? Is there some concept or some set of concepts that you believe gives unity to the English curriculum? What are the basic understandings, if any, that anyone studying English should have? Once those questions are asked and answered--if only tentatively--the methods teacher's job is again to lead the students into a consideration of implications and to help them translate their answers into workable teaching materials and strategies, some of which could be tried out on the peer group. Again, the result should be a considered commitment to an idea which would not easily be given up when challenged, for it would be seen as MY idea which makes sense to ME at this time just as YOU have an alternative idea which makes sense to YOU at this time and though our ideas are different, we can co-exist.

Encouraging the development of alternative views of content and methodology is a sure way of keeping us alive and growing, and to that end we must stop the kind of simplistic preachings one hears all too often in methods classes. "You must plan every lesson very carefully." "You should never teach sentence diagramming." "The way to Hell is paved with SILAS MARNER." "Lectures are deadly wastes of time." "Don't red-pencil all the errors in a student's composition." "Always prepare your students for a reading

assignment." Teaching is too complex a business to be reduced to absolutes. Whether or not a teacher does any or all of those things some of the time or all of the time depends upon mainly whom and what he is trying to teach. Prospective teachers should learn that the concept of appropriate usage applies to teaching as well as to language. How can we or the prospective teacher ever say what would constitute appropriate methods or materials without a particular student and a particular purpose in mind? We can't, of course. All we have available to us in our methods classes are prospective teachers and some alternative views of content and methodology. The most we can do prescriptively is to deal in "if. . .then" propositions. To insist that we can do more than that is to deny the basic essence of teaching.

Those two elements--the prospective teacher and what he thinks is important to teach--are what we have available to us in our methods class, and they should be our main concerns. By realizing that, we can free ourselves from at least part of our past prescriptivism. Obviously we can't tell the prospective teacher what he must be or ought to be as a person. We can, however, help him discover who he is today, how others perceive him, what his strengths and weaknesses are, and how he would like to be as a teacher. And obviously, we can't tell the prospective teacher what he wants to teach. We can, however, help him clarify his ideas and consider them in the light of what our experiences have taught us about teaching. If there's one thing my

experiences have taught me, it's that teaching defies absolutes. And though I have many students in my classes who want absolute prescriptions (and I assume you have them, too), I believe I must thwart those desires with all of the diligence I can muster. To give in is to prepare them to expect to be told exactly what to do by some other expert when they get out into the schools. And if we would have more Quincy High Schools in the world, that won't do.

In the area of practice teaching, which I suggested earlier needed to be restructured in order to produce teachers with the capability of dreaming and screaming, let me describe that component of an experimental program we have at the University of Illinois since it, more than any other I've encountered, prepares prospective teachers to be self-directing and to make choices. One of the essential characteristics of the program is that it lasts for a full semester. During the first three or four weeks the student teacher is free (and encouraged) to move among all the dozen schools in the district, which is northwest of Chicago, observing as many teachers as he can and keeping a record of those teachers whose teaching style or classroom operations he particularly likes. After the observation period, it is the student's responsibility to contract for mini-teaching assignments with one or more of the teachers he observed. Mini-teaching is defined as working with a small group of students within the context

of the regular teacher's ongoing instruction, and it lasts for a four-week period. The purpose of mini-teaching is, of course, to allow the student teacher to have an easy entry into the teaching role by letting him work with a small group of students in a structured situation under a teacher whose work he admires.

After mini-teaching has been completed, the student is allowed another two to three weeks to do more observing, this time looking for one or more teachers under whose guidance he would like to undertake his extended teaching assignments. Extended teaching usually lasts eight to nine weeks, and it is roughly equivalent to a regular student teaching assignment in that the student is given close to the full responsibility for a number of classes. The essential differences between this extended teaching and the usual student teaching assignment are that, first, the student teacher selects the teacher or teachers under whose guidance he works and, second, he is responsible for working the contract specifying his responsibilities.

Another feature of this particular program is that the student teachers take their methods course concurrently with their practice teaching. The methods class, which meets one or two afternoons per week and is taught by teachers in the district, is one of the weaker components of the program. It doesn't work as well as intended because the students are so busy observing and teaching that they resent the time they have to spend in the class and because the

teachers tend to be too prescriptive, that is, they don't help the students clarify and work out what they want to do nearly so much as they tell the students how and what to teach. The student teachers find this inconsistent with the open nature of the rest of the program.

This program is almost four years old, and even with its weaknesses, it does a remarkable job of preparing teachers who know what kind of teachers they want to be and who are able to make intelligent choices among alternatives. The program sacrifices theory for the sake of practice in making decisions and in working in a variety of teaching contexts. It, therefore, produces teachers who are very adept at coping with the realities of the teaching world. The students' job throughout the semester is to make their own ways in the the teacher's world as best they can. What remains untapped throughout the program are the students' dreams and their potential creative resources that could lead to making their dreams their realities.

Now, if somehow we could combine the practice teaching experience of our experimental program with the kind of methods course I've described, I believe we could produce beginning teachers who could turn the teaching world upside down. The would know what it is like to dream their own, not somebody else's dream, and they would know how to make their dreams come true. And given the assignment I described at the beginning of this paper, they might say this:

The beginning teacher should be idealistic enough to know what he wants to accomplish as as a teacher. His ideals are his blueprint for tomorrow. If you try to take them away from him, you are trying to make him stand still and to re-live today again, and again, and again, and eventually to die out of sheer boredom and malaise. And you should know that I will not let you do that to me. I will not dream your dream. I will prevail or die screaming.

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ABSTRACT

The English methods teacher's responsibility is not to advocate any one approach to teaching, but to encourage each student teacher to examine various instructional methods in terms of his or her particular viewpoint. Because of broader experience, the methods teacher can acquaint prospective teachers with conditions and situations which happen in the classroom, testing the implications of a particular conceptual view of English. The result should be a deeper understanding of and a greater commitment to the need for alternative conceptual views of the subject matter. Methods teachers should be encouraging prospective teachers to build their own concept of what is worth teaching and what is worth learning for the students. Once the implications of an idea are examined, it is again the methods teacher's responsibility to help student teachers translate answers into workable materials and strategies. The methods class could also be used as a place where student teachers try their ideas out on their peers first. (RB)